

Report

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BRAZIL: Landless Workers Movement Turns 25

By Michael Fox, South America based journalist. His recent documentary can be viewed at www.beyondelections.com.

Ed. Note: On a Task Force delegation to Brazil in August 2008, members visited two Landless Workers Movement (MST) settlements in the states of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro

In the dying days of Brazil's military dictatorship, late January 1984, a group of nearly a hundred "landless" farmers from across Brazil met in Cascavel, Paran· to debate the founding of a movement for agrarian reform which would unite landless campesinos and farm workers from around the country. It was an unlikely challenge in the world's fifth largest nation, where

even today less than two percent of landowners control nearly half of the total territory.

Two and a half decades later, the tiny MST has grown in to a formidable force. According to MST co-founder Joao Pedro Stedile, the movement has forced the expropriation of 35 million acres of land, larger than the country of Uruguay. MST numbers show that in the last 25 years, 370,000 families have acquired their own land, and 100,000 families are currently in encampments waiting for land. The movement has built hundreds of public schools and taught tens of thousands of its members to read and write. MST members have formed 400 associations and cooperatives to collectively produce their food.

"But those are just statistics," said

Stedile in his closing comments of the movement's 25th birthday celebration on Saturday. "The most important thing that we have built over these last 25 years is that when someone joins the MST, he or she

Anonni settlement in the North of the Southern State- one of the first settlements occupied and won by the landless farmers two decades ago. The 418 families now live in seven communities on tens of thousands of acres of land. Except for the red MST flags, which fly in front of most homes, it's hard to tell the difference between this MST settlement and any closely knit rural community.

Although while fighting for the land, these families lived for years in makeshift huts of black plastic tarp, their homes are now reminiscent of that of any humble, small family farm in the Mid-Western United States. Most have an automobile, and farming equipment like a tractor or a combine which they share.. Each family has about fifty acres of land to farm. A dozen families on the settlement have for many years

been farming and selling their products collectively through their local cooperative.

"See those folks over there?" says Miguel Carter pointing out a group of people fifty



Task Force delegates with members of Eldorado Settlement, Santa Amaro, Bahia. Photo: Sue Severin

stops walking with their head down, acquires dignity and thinks with their brains, organizing their companions in struggle."

The birthday celebration marked the close of last week's 13th national meeting of the MST, in which 1500 MST members from across the country descended on the Southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul to debate the direction of the movement. "It's been great," says Joao Paulo Cardoso, one of a delegation of 47 MST members that made the four-day bus trip from the Northern Brazilian state of Ceara. "It's really good to make new friends, and see old ones. Also the debates and discussions are important to acquire new understanding."

The meeting was held at the MST

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feet away, “They’re founders of the movement. When I met them they didn’t have anything, and now their daughter is studying medicine in Cuba.” Carter is an American University professor who has studied the MST for more than two decades, and who attended the 25-year anniversary celebration over the weekend. “The MST has become the most sophisticated and the largest and most energetic of all the social movements that have flourished in Brazilian society... but they have to permanently do it against a really steep hill,” says Carter.

While Brazilian law states that unproductive land may be bought by the Brazilian government and distributed to landless farmers through Brazil’s Agrarian Reform Institute (INCRA), large landowners have violently defended their properties. To counter the MST “threat,” landowners formed their own organization, the Rural Democratic Union (UDR) in 1985. According to Brazil’s Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), dozens of campesinos are assassinated each year across Brazil.

In Rio Grande do Sul, under the conservative governorship of Yeda Crusius, the state police force has also been cracking down on the movement. Last June, the state Justice Department called for the disbanding of the movement throughout the state. The repercussions were felt even at the event, where a police helicopter kept vigil over the meeting and the Rio Grande do Sul Justice Department and Department of Investigation erected a barricade on the road into the Anonni settlement, where they controlled



Photo: Ericka O. Erickson

Oswaldo told how he worked long hours for 20 years in an office and never saw his children grow up. He’s happy now living with extended family in Itatiaia Settlement.

entry in to the event by inspecting names, cars and belongings. “On top of the state military brigade here watching us, they also put a battalion of shock troops over there to protect the area of Monsanto,” said Stedile. The reference is a sign of things to come.

In a press conference on Friday, MST leader Marina dos Santos warned landowners that in 2009 they would be “intensifying (their) struggle for agrarian reform.” But she also admitted that their “struggle for land, is much more difficult, because it is not just against the landowner, but a multinational corporation, and this means that there is no space for land distribution and agrarian reform.”

At this year’s conference, MST members ratified that they are now primarily fighting against the multinational agro-industry. “We spent many years struggling against the large landowners alone because we believed— and we believe—that the *latifundio* is the principle cause of the poverty and inequality in the rural area,” said Stedile on Saturday. “But over the last few years, capitalism has transformed itself... and dramatically altered the model of agricultural production in the world, and in our country. Now, because of this new dominance of financial capital, large multinational corporations indirectly control the land, the production, the seeds, and the ag-

ricultural riches.”

Over the last ten years, the agro-industry in Brazil, led by US companies, Cargill, Bunge, ADM—and Monsanto—has grown by bushels. The Minnesota-based Cargill is the largest agribusiness in the world. According to Brasil de Fato, in Brazil, in 2005 alone, Cargill had a gross income of more than \$4 billion. With the biofuel “revolution,” ethanol production has increased. In 2008, sugar cane plantations in Brazil grew by 14%, to more than 17 million acres in production. Monsanto controls a healthy chunk of the Brazilian chemical pesticide and genetically-modified seed market.

Even on the Anonni settlement, many residents have been forced to use Monsanto pesticides and cultivate genetically-modified soy because of marketability and constant seed contaminations from nearby farms. Last week, Jorge dos Santos, one of the founders of the Anonni settlement, pointed out where crop dusting from the neighboring plantation had killed part of his garden.

In order to counter the growth of the agro-industry, the MST declared last week that they are entering “a new phase.” “It’s not just about acquiring one farm here and there. That’s still important, but it’s not sufficient,” says Stedile, who called for

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Experts Call on Obama to Improve US-Latin American Relations

Ed. Note: *Anticipating a Democratic victory in the November 4 presidential elections, 368 academics specializing in Latin America sent a letter urging Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama to become a partner, rather than an adversary, concerning changes already under way in Latin America. Signers include Eric Hershberg, President of Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and twelve LASA past presidents, along with over 350 other academics and Latin America experts.*

October 20, 2008

Dear Senator Obama:

We write to offer our congratulations on your campaign and to express our hope that as the next president of the United States you will take advantage of an historic opportunity to improve relations with Latin America. As scholars of the region, we also wish to convey our analysis regarding the process of change now underway in Latin America.

Just as the people of the United States have begun to debate basic questions regarding the sort of society they want—thanks in part to your own candidacy but also owing to the magnitude of the current financial crisis—so too have the people of Latin America. In fact, the debate about a just and fair society has been going on in Latin America for more than a decade, and the majority are opting, like you and so many of us in the United States, for hope and change. As academics personally and professionally committed to development and democracy in Latin America, we are hopeful that during your presidency the United States can become a partner rather than an adversary to the positive changes already under way in the hemisphere.

The current impetus for change in Latin America is a rejection of the model of economic growth that has been imposed in most countries since the early 1980s, a model that has concentrated wealth, relied unsuccessfully on unrestricted market forces to solve deep social problems and undermined human welfare. The current rejection of this model is broad-based and democratic. In fact, contemporary move-

ments for change in Latin America reveal significantly increased participation by workers, peasants, women, Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples—in a word, the grassroots. Such movements are coming to power in country after country. They are neither puppets, nor blinded by fanaticism and ideology, as caricatured by some mainstream pundits. To the contrary, these movements deserve our respect, friendship and support.

Latin Americans have often viewed the United States not as a friend but as an oppressor, the guarantor of an international economic system that works against them, rather than for them—the very antithesis of hope and change. The Bush Administration has made matters much worse, and U.S. prestige in the region is now at a historic low. Washington's tendency to fight against hope and change has been especially prominent in recent US responses to the democratically elected governments of Venezuela and Bolivia. While anti-American feelings run deep, history demonstrates that these feelings can change. In the 1930s, after two decades of conflict with the region, the United States swore off intervention and adopted a Good Neighbor Policy. Not coincidentally, it was the most harmonious time in the history of US-Latin American relations. In the 1940s, nearly every country in the region became our ally in World War Two. It can happen again.

There are many other challenges, too. Colombia, the main focus of the Bush Administration's policy, is currently the scene of the second largest humanitarian crisis in the world, with four million internally displaced people. Its government, which criminalizes even peaceful protest, seeks an extension of the free trade policies that against which much of the hemisphere

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“grassroots agrarian reform,” but stated that it “cannot be carried out by the landless alone.”

In what could mark a notable shift in their organizing strategy, MST leaders announced they will be building alliances with unions, activists and progressive leaders in both the countryside and in the cities across Brazil in order to create a united front against the

is already reacting against. Cuba has begun a process of transition that should be supported in positive ways, such as through the dialogue you advocate. Mexicans and Central Americans migrate by the tens of thousands to seek work in the United States, where their labor power is much needed but their presence is denigrated by a public that has, since the development of opinion polling in the 1930s, always opposed immigration from anywhere. The way to manage immigration is not by building a giant wall, but rather the United States should support more equitable economic development in Mexico and Central America and, indeed, throughout the region. In addition, the US must reconsider drug control policies that have simply not worked and have been part of the problem of political violence, especially in Mexico, Colombia and Peru. And the US must renew its active support for human rights throughout the region. Unfortunately, in the eyes of many Latin Americans, the United States has come to stand for the support of inequitable regimes.

Finally, we implore you to commit your administration to the firm support of constitutional rights, including academic and intellectual freedom. Most of us are members of the Latin American Studies Association, the largest professional association of experts on the region, and we have experienced first-hand how the Bush administration's attempt to restrict academic exchange with Cuba is counter-productive and self-defeating. We hope for an early opportunity to discuss this and other issues regarding Latin America with your administration.

Our hope is that you will embrace the opportunity to inaugurate a new period of hemispheric understanding and collaboration for the common welfare. We ask for change and not only in the United States. ●

agro-industry and “neoliberalism.”

“Changes in the economic model are only possible in Brazil if we can join with all of the union federations, with all of the Leftist parties and with all of the activists that want changes for the country,” said Stedile.

Source: www.upsidedownworld.org, January 28, 2009

Haiti's Political Prisoners!

By *Pierre Labosierre, Leslie Mullin and Robert Roth, Haiti Action Committee*

In Haiti today, hundreds of political prisoners are jailed under the most inhumane conditions. Arrested during or after the U.S.-orchestrated 2004 coup d'état that overthrew the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, most of these prisoners have never been charged or tried. The United Nations occupying forces, charged with enforcing "law and order," have been full participants in these illegal detentions, as has the Haitian government of President Rene Preval.

With 9,000 soldiers from 42 countries, led by Brazil, the UN Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH) has spent \$2 billion fielding armed patrols throughout Haitian poor neighborhoods to repress and intimidate the people, arbitrarily killing civilians, and sometimes sexually assaulting young girls and women. In the meantime, the economic conditions worsen and the basic needs of the population remain unmet.

While MINUSTAH issues glowing reports of progress and political stability, the reality is quite different. Prices of basic commodities have risen, leading to popular uprisings demanding food. Grassroots activists, especially those associated with President Aristide's Lavalas Party, have continued to be arrested and attacked. Human rights activist Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine was disappeared in August of 2007, and neither the United Nations nor the Preval government has launched a serious investigation into his kidnapping. At the same time, conditions inside Haiti's prisons grow more horrific each day.

Prisoners are dying inside the sweltering, overcrowded 2500-person National Penitentiary (NP) built to house 800. They suffer dehydration and disease from filthy water. Beriberi from starvation rations is epidemic. Cell "blocks" built to hold five or six people are packed with up to 26 bodies at a time; prisoners take shifts sleeping and standing.

Violence against prisoners has sometimes escalated to wholesale massacre. On December 1st, 2004, a widely publicized incident occurred at the NP when inmates were shot after they broke out of their cells to protest their conditions and illegal confinement. Eyewitnesses reported the police took up posi-

tions on the catwalk and opened heavy fire. The official death toll was 10, but witness statements provided to the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) support a much higher death count.

In May 2006, during inauguration ceremonies for President-elect Préval, MINUSTAH sharpshooters targeted prisoners at the NP, killing an estimated ten men. The prisoners had rallied inside the compound to show solidarity with the incoming president. They condemned the unjust detention of political prisoners, and demanded the return of Aristide. Several thousand supporters left nearby inaugural events and marched to the penitentiary to protest the killings. Survivors held the bodies of dead prisoners over their heads for people to see from the street below.

After Préval took office, grassroots demands and international pressure for the release of well-known political prisoners slowly began to make headway. These campaigns resulted in the release of former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, key Lavalas activists So Ann, Amanus Maette, Paul Raymond, Rene Civil, and former Interior Minister Privert. Yet hundreds of lesser-known activists remain locked up, their petitions for justice ignored or denied.

Ronald Dauphin, a grassroots Lavalas activist, was arrested by armed paramilitary troops on March 1, 2004 - the day after US officials forced President Aristide into exile. Mr. Dauphin has spent five years in jail without having been convicted of any crime. For three years his case has been stuck in legal limbo, with no progress or active investigation. Dauphin is the last detainee held for the so-called "La Scierie massacre." No one has ever been convicted in connection with the La Scierie incident; most defendants have had their charges ordered dismissed by courts. Human rights groups and the UN have concluded that the alleged "massacre" never occurred.

In August 2006, Amnesty International joined human rights activists and Haiti's grassroots movement in calling for Haiti's government to promptly bring to trial or release all political prisoners, and condemning the prolonged detention of Aristide supporters as politically motivated. In October 2006, the National Lawyers Guild urged Haiti's government to release the remaining

political prisoners, with particular emphasis on the defendants held in the La Scierie case.

In July 2008, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that the State of Haiti had violated the human rights of former Prime Minister Neptune, another defendant in the La Scierie case, by holding him without trial for over two years with no proof he committed a crime. Neptune was provisionally released, as was another defendant in the case, Amanus Maette. Yet Ronald Dauphin remains in prison.

Although Dauphin's wife brings him food and medicine when she can, rising costs for food and gasoline make it difficult for her to visit. Without adequate food, clean water, sanitation and medical attention, Dauphin's detention amounts to a death sentence. He is ill from an undiagnosed condition. There is a prison dispensary, but even the prison doctor says the facility is incapable of caring for him. Dauphin's co-defendant, Wantales Lormejuste, died in 2007 from untreated tuberculosis contracted inside prison. Minimally, Dauphin wants to be offered medical release to be treated by specialists.

The case of Ronald Dauphin stands as an example of the ongoing repression faced by the Lavalas movement in Haiti. As the United States and the United Nations continue to claim progress towards democracy in Haiti, it is more important than ever to shine a light on the desperate situation inside Haiti's prisons.

Source: www.haitisolidarity.net

WHAT YOU CAN DO:



Sign and circulate the on-line petition for Ronald Dauphin's release - www.petitiononline.com/march04/petition.html
Sign up at action.haiti@gmail.com to receive latest news and action alerts.

CHIAPAS: Communiqué from the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee, General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) at 15 Years from its Armed Uprising

*Translation by Mary Ann Tenuto,
Chiapas Support Committee*

Ed. Note: *The New Years Message read in Spanish by Commandante David and in Tzotzil by Commandante Javier from the EZLN is their first message since Sub-comandante Marcos declared in November 2007 that they were preparing for a war which they saw coming, and consequently there would be no more public appearances "for awhile." The New Year message tells in their own words of the escalating counterinsurgency over the past two years and the hardship it is causing in the Zapatista communities.*

The Zapatistas, indigenous peoples that propose struggling for a better and more humane world, begin to be more pursued and beaten up in all aspects by the bad rulers of our country and by the powerful and the political parties.

And so for 15 years we have suffered threats, harassment, persecution, military and paramilitary attacks. The bad government, the political parties and their allies, although they may be poor people, do not cease their attacks in many forms for the purpose of stopping the advance of our struggle and destroying our base that consists of all the peoples in resistance.

For 15 years the bad government has founded, financed and trained paramilitary groups in all the villages that have the task of provoking, threatening and dividing our peoples.

In order to weaken and destroy our social bases the bad government has been distributing alms through their aid programs to families affiliated with the political parties for the purpose of pleasing, quieting and calming the hunger of poor people.

The bad government has tried to con-

vince and buy the conscience of our support bases, promising them better living conditions to forget their dead and their just demands. Unfortunately, there are indigenous brothers that have fallen into the bad government's traps believing that with this they are going to improve their living conditions without struggling.

Nonetheless, we Zapatistas did not rise up in arms to ask for crumbs or to be treated as beggars. We struggle for a real democracy, liberty and justice for everyone. We struggle for the good of humanity and against neo-liberalism. We struggle for another more just and humane world. For a world where all those who inhabit our planet fit.



Moyeses Zuniga / Associated Press

Subcomandante Marcos criticized Mexican President Felipe Calderon and his war on drugs, leftist leaders and even President-elect Barack Obama in an appearance at the "Festival of Dignified Rage" held in Chiapas state.

But the bad rulers, the powerful, those that consider themselves lords and ladies of everything, persist in taking out the wealth of our peoples, on destroying nature and on destroying humanity.

Therefore, to all the brothers and sisters, compañeros and compañeras of Mexico and of the world, we ask you and invite you to organize and unite each one in their towns against a common enemy. But we must seek the form and the mechanisms of how to unite and globalize our struggles, our resistances and our rebel spirit.

But it will only be possible if we propose walking together and struggling together without importance to the time and distance that we encounter.

Brothers and Sisters, compañeros and compañeras, let's carry forward then our banners of struggle, let's make our struggle, our resistance, our dignified rage and rebelliousness strong and large.

We Zapatistas, the original peoples of these lands, we are going to continue forward in the struggle that we have started. We are going to continue resisting the bad government's blows with dignity and a rebel spirit.

In the 15 years that they have been beating up on us we have learned to resist and to

survive, but it's also because we have counted on the support and solidarity of many brothers and sisters of Mexico and of the world.

It is this way that we have started to construct our autonomies at the different levels, like health, education, commercialization and in the self-government of our peoples. With effort and difficulty we have tried to take a few steps but it has still not been sufficient to resolve the problems and the great needs of our peoples.

Our authorities have tried to resolve the problems of our peoples and some of the multiple needs of our communi-

ties, but the large part of our needs continue without solutions. The hunger, the misery and the illnesses are increasing day by day.

In spite of all this, we continue forward in our struggle because we will not betray the blood of our fallen that struggled until giving their lives for democracy, liberty and justice. We will follow their example and continue our slogan of struggling for the fatherland or dying for liberty.

Source: *La Jornada*, January 2, 2009;
www.chiapas-support.org

PARAGUAY: The Struggle For Land

By *Natalia Ruiz Díaz, International Press Service (IPS)*

The government of Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo is facing its first big challenge: providing solutions for the age-old dispute over land ownership between peasant farmers, large landholders and Brazilian settlers. Land reform, one of Lugo's main campaign pledges, has become a hot issue requiring an urgent response from the government since the death of campesino leader Bienvenido Melgarejo in a violent eviction of landless peasants from a farm in the north-eastern department of Alto Paraná on Oct. 3. Campesinos have been mobilising and threatening to occupy lands throughout the eastern region of the country, demanding concrete measures.

"Paraguay has the highest concentration of land ownership in the Americas," sociologist Ramón Fogel told IPS. He pointed out that although Lugo promised to combat inequality in rural areas, he has to deal with a parliament that has so far not shown much interest in the matter. Lugo, a former bishop, took office on Aug. 15 without the benefit of a majority in Congress. The largest group of lawmakers belongs to the Colorado Party, which is now in opposition after exercising absolute power for most of the 20th century, including 35 years of dictatorship under the late General Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989). The second largest group in parliament is the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA), the biggest party in the governing Patriotic Alliance for Change (APC). However, the PLRA is a staunch defender of private property, in contrast to Lugo's position that the occupation of unproductive plots of land is justified as a last resort in the struggle of landless campesinos.

According to Belarmino Balbuena, the leader of the Paraguayan Campesino Movement (MCP), the current crisis in the countryside is due to a lack of political will. "The state is absent in the rural areas, owing to the economic model that has been implemented in this country," he told IPS. Meanwhile the Asociación Rural, which represents large landowners, sent a warning to the government demanding "a definitive end" to the conflict. The head of the association, Juan Núñez, maintained that the armed forces should intervene to protect the soybean crop during planting season. But the crisis has gone beyond the

country's borders. Brazilian farmers who have settled in Paraguayan territory have asked the government of Brazil to mediate in the tension, which in some cases has escalated into confrontations with local groups of campesinos.

The Lugo administration's response was that it will seek the best solution, within a framework of respect for the rule of law. Through negotiations, a first agreement was arrived at between the campesino Coordinating Committee for the Defense of Sovereignty and Agrarian Reform, and a group of Brazilian landowners. The Brazilian farmers agreed to sell 22,000 hectares to the Paraguayan state, which will pay for the land using part of the revenues from the Paraguayan-Brazilian Itaipú hydroelectric dam that are set aside for social spending. Balbuena stressed that resistance against the Brazilian soybean farmers is growing because the spraying of their crops hurts campesino communities and their crops and livestock. "This dispute is not about occupations of land, but about the problems associated with the use of toxic agrochemicals," he said.

The boom in soybean monoculture in eastern Paraguay in the last few years is at the root of the present conflicts. In seven years, the area under soybean crops in Paraguay doubled, reaching 2.4 million hectares by 2007, equivalent to 25 percent of all cultivated land in the country. And all of it is genetically modified (GM) soy, according to the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications. Paraguay is now seventh in the global ranking for the area under transgenic crops, and has no legislation on the use of GM seeds. It is also the world's fourth largest exporter of soybeans.

There are 81,000 Brazilians living in this country, not counting their Paraguayan-born descendants. Most of them live along the Brazilian border. "Between 1992 and 2002, the number of people describing themselves as Brazilian nationals fell. However, there are many more Portuguese-speakers," Fabricio Vázquez, a researcher at the National University's Faculty of Agrarian Sciences, told IPS. Vázquez said that Brazilian immigrants should be regarded as a social group undergoing a process of integration. "Rural immigrants (Brazilians, Canadians, Russians, and so on) settled a long time ago in border areas that were neglected by the Paraguayan state. The issue is not whether they are many or few, but

that they are a group of producers who have a large socioeconomic impact," he said.

As an urgent measure to address the rural crisis, the National Institute for Land and Rural Development (INDERT) announced that it would repossess plots of land it had awarded to people who are not qualified as beneficiaries of the land reform law, and to recover state lands whose present owners came by them illegally. In an interview with IPS, Alberto Alderete, the head of INDERT, said that these plans are aimed at recovering state lands so that they can be distributed to campesino families. He said an integrated development plan for new campesino settlements is essential, to ensure that the beneficiaries put down new roots, and farm in a diversified and sustainable way. The Paraguayan state has no official record of the number of landless campesinos, but studies indicate that there are about 120,000 families without land, and a similar number of families with less than five hectares. There is no official register of land that has been allocated illegally.

But a report on illegal land ownership by the Paraguayan Truth and Justice Commission, which was set up to investigate human rights violations committed during the Stroessner dictatorship and the 15 years of transition to democracy, indicates that serious irregularities marred the allocation of a total of 7,851,295 hectares. The study examined 200,705 awards of land between 1954 and 2003, and confirmed that the beneficiaries were relatives of Stroessner himself, or politicians and army officers directly associated with his government. According to a study by social researcher Quintín Riquelme, numbers of very large estates as well as of tiny smallholdings increased in Paraguay during the period known as the transition to democracy. This highlights a trend that has been exacerbated in recent years because of the aggressive expansion of soybean cultivation and cattle ranching, driven by the rise of prices on the international market.

The study shows that Paraguayan and Brazilian landowners and speculators have been buying up land from campesino families, which has accelerated the process of concentration of land tenure and has increased the number of campesinos left without land to farm. This in turn has fuelled a growing rural exodus, to urban areas as well as to countries like Argentina, Spain and the United States.

Source: *IPS November 6, 2008*

Bolivia: Morales Enacts New Constitution in El Alto

By Benjamin Dangl, author of *"The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia"*

Saturday, 7 February 2009

Fog covered El Alto, Bolivia as social movements from around the country marched into the city to mark the official passage of Bolivia's new constitution. "This is the second independence, the true liberation of Bolivia," Bolivian President Evo Morales said as he signed the new constitution.

The new constitution was approved by 61.43% of voters in a national referendum on January 25th. Among many other changes, the document empowers Bolivia's indigenous and Afro-Bolivian communities, establishes broader access to basic services, education and healthcare, limits the size of large land purchases, expands the role of the state in the management of natural resources and the economy and prohibits the existence of US military bases on Bolivian soil.

Wilfredo, a Movement Toward Socialism (MAS, the political party of Morales) activist, attended the event in El Alto with his daughter Betty on his shoulders. He said, "I am a MAS fanatic, it's in my blood. It is very

important that this event is happening in El Alto, because during the Gas War in 2003 it was El Alto that kicked out [President] Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and brought about this process. Now change will even come to Santa Cruz!"

El Alto, a rapidly growing city outside of La Paz, has been the site of numerous revolts in recent years, revolts which set in stone many demands – including the nationalization of gas and the re-writing of the constitution – that became major platforms of the MAS. El Alto was also the base for the 1781 siege of Spanish-controlled La Paz led by indigenous rebel Tupac Katari. Morales spoke at length of Katari's legacy, describing the passage of the new constitution as the continuation of a struggle sparked in part by Katari in his fight for indigenous liberation.

"After 500 years of rebellion against invasions, against permanent looting, after more than 180 years of resistance against the colonial state, after 20 years of permanent struggle against the neoliberal model, today, 7th of February of 2009, a new Bolivia is born," Morales said, his voice echoing across the altiplano.

Bolivian flag-colored kites flew in the

sky, countless fireworks shot off from rooftops, some of them colliding in the air, and exploding onto neighboring buildings. Social organizations' banners were draped from balconies around the neighborhood.

Daniel Quiroga, a union member of the Regional Workers' Center who was born in El Alto, said, "I support the constitution because I am handicapped and this new constitution supports handicapped people. The constitution will bring about change in Bolivia without corruption. This is why I voted for it."

"For the first time in the history of Latin America and in the world, basic services, water, electricity, telephone are now a human right; they will be a public service not a private business," Morales said in his speech. When he announced that the new constitution prohibits foreign military bases on Bolivian soil, the crowd went wild.

Guatemalan indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchu, winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace prize, was in attendance. Regarding Bolivia's new constitution, Menchu said, "It is something that will open a new era of struggle for the people of this continent."

Source: www.upsidedownworld.org

Second Coming of the Sandinistas Turns Sour

By Rory Carroll, *The Observer*,
Managua

Ed. Note: *Article excerpted*

Two years ago today Daniel Ortega was a newly-minted president starting his term at the helm of a Sandinista government. The one-time Marxist revolutionary had swept back to power promising social democracy, inclusiveness and a fight against poverty. It was a heady moment. A movement which had inspired left-wingers all over the world in the 1980s had been given another chance to transform this impoverished, tropical strip of Central America.

But the ubiquitous gaudy billboards with a smiling Ortega cut a surreal spectacle last week. Managua's mood is black, not pink. A political crisis has convulsed Nicaragua and spread fear, loathing and division. Rival groups have mounted blockades, clashed in the streets and torched government offices.

Opposition parties have shut down the national assembly and refused to pass a budget. International donors have slashed aid and business confidence has collapsed. The real purpose of the government-funded "harmonizers," it is widely believed, is to give police a pretext to block demonstrators from main junctions, part of a strategy to stifle dissent.

"The country is paralyzed, we are in crisis," said Carlos Fernando Chamorro, a leading commentator and government critic. The proximate cause is fallout from local elections in November, which the Sandinistas allegedly rigged, sparking dire warnings that Nicaragua is headed back towards dictatorship.

The risk is not civil war. Nicaragua remains one of the safest countries in Central America, but that authoritarianism will replace democracy and the economy will nosedive: a grim way to mark the

revolution's 30th anniversary. "The Sandinistas are closer to Don Corleone's Mafia than a political party," said Sofía Montenegro, an outspoken feminist whose women's rights NGO was raided by police. "And Ortega is closer to Robert Mugabe or Papa Doc than any other Latin American leader. His vision is completely totalitarian."

The election, said by critics to be the most blatant fraud since the Somoza dynasty rigged a 1947 poll, capped a tumultuous year which put Nicaragua back in the limelight. Ortega has been accused of persecuting revered revolutionary figures-turned-critics, notably the poet Ernesto Cardenal. Intellectuals and former sympathizers, such as Noam Chomsky, Salman Rushdie and José Saramago, retaliated with public rebukes. "Once more a revolution has been betrayed from within," lamented the Portuguese Nobel laureate.

How has it come to this? How is it that a

Sandinistas, continued from page 7

country which suffered so much, came so far and inspired so many has edged back to the abyss? The principal cause resides inside the ring-fenced walls of the first family's compound in Montoya Street. Here Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo, his chief of staff, head of press and de facto deputy president, live, work and plot.

They are a formidable, if bizarre, double act. One an old-school underground revolutionary and ideologue, the other a poet and new age guru, who mix astral charts with Catholic fundamentalism and political strategy. Murillo devised the all-pink poster campaign as well as the emphasis on love and linking her husband's work to God's work. "She is our Sarah Palin," groaned Montenegro.

One theory for the alleged election fraud is that Ortega did not want Murillo, his campaign manager, to lose face. Another is that the president, haunted by the fact he squeaked into office, was impatient for a thumping mandate on a par with those of other left-wing leaders such as Bolivia's Evo Morales and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

Whatever the reason, for Dora María Téllez, a legendary former Sandinista guerrilla, it was a tragedy. "The dream we had in the 1980s was transcendental, but now we are on the path to a new dictatorship. The Sandinista party has become a political machine for the Ortega family's power." Téllez knows something about tyranny. In 1978, as a young medical student, she led a raid on the national palace which took 2,000 government officials hostage, a key moment in the revolution, and later led the brigade that took León, the first city to fall to the Sandinistas.

Téllez, a health minister in the first elected Sandinista administration, staged a hunger strike last year to protest the banning of her party, a breakaway Sandinista group, from the elections. The Sandinistas went on to claim 105 of the 146 municipalities, including Managua, the most important and controversial. "They already control all the institutions and now they have stolen an election," she said. "There are no guarantees left."

In the run-up to the poll, the Sandinista-controlled electoral authority banned the breakaway Sandinistas and another small party, citing technical reasons, and excluded heavyweight foreign and domestic election observers. The opposition claimed voter rolls

were manipulated and ballot results were changed, obliging the electoral authority to issue only partial results. In some wards there were reportedly more Sandinista votes than voters. The Organization of American States, a pan-regional body, was among those to express concern. There are signs that the uproar may unite Nicaragua's opposition and sink Ortega's hopes of amending the constitution to run again.

Foreign donors, who supply about 40% of the national budget, have slashed aid in protest. The US suspended \$64m in anti-poverty relief and European governments cut an estimated \$90m. With coffee prices falling and Venezuelan aid imperiled by dwindling oil revenues, Ortega's government reportedly has been forced to take \$60m from foreign reserves. "You look at the numbers and it's clear things are going to get a lot worse," said a western diplomat.

Neoconservatives in the US have been unable to conceal their glee that Ortega, their 1980s foe, has lost his sheen even for much of the left. Richard Sanders, deputy head of mission at the fortress-like US embassy in Managua, said: "Democracy is under a great deal of stress here. Observers say the elections did not reflect the views of Nicaraguan voters. It is quite disturbing. It is not a good sign of where the country is going."

Fraud or not, Nicaragua is no police state. There are no death squads; no midnight knocks on the door. Privately owned newspapers and TV stations openly assail the president. Sit on a bus and you hear people volubly and fearlessly exchanging political opinions. Opposition parties control many municipalities and most national assembly seats. The army and police retain some autonomy and are models of restraint compared to their colleagues in Guatemala and El Salvador.

Is there a revolution in Nicaragua? The government says its administration is the second phase of the radical process which blazed into history 30 years ago. Others are scornful. "The revolution of the 1980s doesn't exist. It's a phantasm," said Sergio Ramirez, a writer who served as vice-president under Ortega in the 1980s but later broke away.

The *commandante* clawed back influence through Sandinista municipalities, courts and trade unions and by forging a "pacto" with President Arnoldo Alemán, a convicted

embezzler, which kept the "fat one" out of prison in exchange for favors, not least lowering the threshold for victory in presidential elections. In the November 2006 election Ortega won just under 38% of the vote, his lowest ever margin, but prevailed over a divided opposition. Daniel was back.

"We all gave him the benefit of the doubt and said let's work with him. We were excited," said one western aid official. Europe, the US, the World Bank and IMF kept money flowing and the new president obtained additional funds from Chávez. The government abolished school fees, sent medical teams to remote areas and introduced social programs to give credits, seeds, tools and farm animals to the rural poor. According to the deputy foreign minister, chronic malnutrition, illiteracy and maternal mortality were reduced. "So beautiful, all the people are sharing and working together! It has been like waking up from a nightmare," said Gladys Manzanares, 60, a sweatshop union organizer. Skeptics, however, say social programs are meager, unsustainable and politicized. "Peanuts, and quickly eaten," said one aid agency official.

"Do we think the Ortega government is perfect? No," wrote Chuck Kaufman, national co-coordinator of the US-based Nicaragua Network. "We have criticized violent excesses of Sandinista supporters during the recent electoral process. And we have cautioned that monitoring foreign funding of NGOs is not used as an excuse to persecute women's rights groups." On a recent delegation, when the participants got outside Managua, and away from the chattering political class, we were all impressed by the moving stories we heard from peasant women who have benefitted by the Ortega government's Zero Hunger program. To me that program looks like the embodiment of the old adage, 'If I give her a fish, tomorrow she'll be hungry, but if I give her a fishing pole, tomorrow she'll eat fish.' "Needless to say, I was impressed." Unlike many solidarity groups, Kaufman will not turn his back on the flawed Second Coming of the Sandinistas. "Do we think [it] is better than another right-wing, neoliberal government beholden to US masters? Absolutely," concluded Kaufman.

Source: *The Observer, Guardian UK, January 11, 2009*

VENEZUELA: Votes “Yes” in Referendum

By Diana Raby, author and *Latin America Studies* researcher, UK

Ed. Note: With nearly 70% voter turnout on Sunday February 15, Venezuelans approved a constitutional amendment to end term limits for all elected officials by a much wider margin than predicted. Results of the referendum released by the National Electoral Council revealed that 55% voted in favor of the amendment, while 45% were opposed.

The referendum demonstrated that most Venezuelans are satisfied with their country's system of participatory democracy, which is based on the transfer of power to the people. According to UN statistics, governmental policies have dramatically reduced poverty over the last ten years, giving Venezuela the lowest rate of socioeconomic inequality in the region. In his victory speech at the presidential palace, Chávez said he expected to be a candidate in presidential elections in 2012, “unless the people decide otherwise.”

February 11, 2009

Next Sunday, Venezuelans vote in a referendum on a proposed Constitutional Amendment that will allow for any candidate to stand for the Presidency, or indeed for any elective office, without restriction on the number of terms they may serve. Only the people's vote will decide whether they are elected and how many terms they serve.

In other words, if President Hugo Chávez, who is already serving his second term under the provisions of the 1999 Constitution, wishes to stand for a third term, he may do so. Equally, the opposition mayor of Greater Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, may stand three or four times if he wants (and if the people vote for him).

This is no different from the practice here in the UK, where Margaret Thatcher won four elections for the Conservatives (although we did not have the privilege of voting for her personally as Prime Minister), and Tony Blair won three times for Labor. It is, of course, different from the situation in the US, where some sixty years ago a limit of two consecutive terms was introduced for the presidency. (Other countries without term limits are Japan, Australia, France, Italy and Canada.)

But why is there such a fuss about this

proposal in Venezuela? Once again, as so many times in the last ten years, the media are full of stories about Chávez' dictatorial tendencies or being President for life, and the opposition goes on about “the principle of alternation (*alternabilidad*).” But they know perfectly well that Chávez will only be re-elected in 2012 if the people vote for him in elections which have been certified time and again as impeccably free and honest, and that the possibility of mid-term recall still exists and will be maintained. And alternation, as the experience here in the UK and in so many “advanced democracies” shows, is all too often a neat device to prevent any real change while giving the appearance of choice with a superficial change of personnel.

The real problem is – and everyone knows this, they just don't want to discuss it – that Chávez represents the continuation of the Bolivarian project, a popular revolution which has transformed Venezuela and inspired similar transformations in several other Latin American countries. And that against Chávez, the opposition will again lose, and lose badly as they have done before.

Hugo Chávez is the people's candidate, and for the foreseeable future will continue

to be. No, he is not a dictator, and of course he is not infallible. He himself has often recognized his failings. But he has demonstrated time and again his commitment to serving the people – the poor, the workers, the excluded – of Venezuela, and they have reaffirmed their confidence in him. If he were to go – and thank God, this is not the case – it is to be hoped that the people would find, indeed create (as they did with Chávez) another leader or leaders. But why substitute a leader of proven ability, indeed one who has grown in stature and maturity with every new stage of the revolutionary process?

In these circumstances, those who talk about “Chavismo without Chávez” are either naïve or ill-intentioned. What is at stake in Venezuela is a fundamental clash of class interests, although one which is being played out as far as possible in peaceful and democratic fashion. The campaign for the Constitutional Amendment to abolish term limits is simply the latest battleground in this contest, and as such, a victory for the “Yes” camp on Sunday 15 February is crucial – and let's hope the victory is a decisive one!

Source: www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4196, February 11, 2009

El Salvador: Community Fights Dump

By Dan McKenzie

Ed Note: Task Force members Lucienne O'Keefe, Roger Stoll, George Friemoth and Dale Sorensen were part of an 85-member election monitoring delegation organized by CIS (Center of Exchange and Solidarity) to observe the legislative and municipal elections taking place in El Salvador on January 18. They were part of an 8-member team sent to monitor in Santa Ana, the second largest city in the country. In the mayors race the location of a garbage dump was the overriding issue. The Salvadoran Supreme Court has agreed to hear environmental damage claims after bribery and heavy police violence failed to fracture opposition to the construction of private waste dump. This class-action suit is first in El Salvador's history.

On November 20, 2008 ten members of the Santa Gertrudis community of Cutumay

Camones filed a class-action lawsuit against the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources for refusing to conduct a fair and impartial assessment of community concerns over the placement of a garbage dump. The government's proposal is to construct the dump on a hill above a 10-hectare crop plantation and at a 700-meter distance from an aquifer that delivers water to the homes of more than 3,000 families. Construction began in June 2007 without community consultation and an adequate environmental impact study.

The court's decision to hear the case came after a 17-month-long conflict wherein 3,000 people from in and outside of Cutumay Camones mobilized against Presys LLC, the private company that was hired for the construction of the landfill. Physical clashes began on September 11th 2007 at 3:00am, when 100 members of the Salvadoran National Civilian Police raided Santa Gertrudis in an attempt to break a community road blockade that was denying Presys' workers access to the con-

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struction site. A representative from the company threatened protestors, saying they had “no idea what they were getting into.” The September 11th incursion was the first of five police attacks in a period of two months. The early morning raids grew from 100 to 300 to 500 officers, then into what protestors called a “sea of ninja turtles” in the final raid on November 22nd. None of the raids succeeded in breaking the blockade.

The Community Association of the Fountain of Blessing (ACOFUBEN), a collective decision-making body of 11 communities in Cutumay Camones who built a water tank in 2002, has been involved in every aspect of resistance to the project. “The community has been a lead actor in opposing the dump because they worked to build the aquifer,” according to Carlos Eduardo Guzmán, Vice President of ACOFUBEN. “We started with 402 families and now there are 700. We created access the government refused to give. Now we have clean drinking water flowing into every home in 11 communities. We’re not going to let that go.”

“In May of 2007, we knew something strange was happening. People had come to survey the area and then the work trucks and equipment started coming,” said Adonay Mendoza, ACOFUBEN’s Water Project Administrator. “We decided to go to the Mayor Orlando Mena’s office to find out what was going on, but he wouldn’t give us a meeting. In June, they began working without our permission.” After visiting the

ACOFUBEN office in August to discourage resistance to the landfill, Mena’s Christian Democratic Party (PDC) began offering concessions to individuals in Santa Gertrudis in exchange for their support.

“The Mayor told us that this was a model project... that if they could open the dump, they could also build roads and a hospital,” Mendoza said. The successful completion of the project would not only help the PDC score political points with Santa Ana’s political, corporate, and press elite, who have pressured the government to resolve trash disposal issues, but would also allow members of the PDC party to pocket millions of dollars through service rate increases – \$14 per ton of garbage at 250 tons per day – and buy support for the privatization of water treatment and distribu-

tion services down the road. Mena has spent \$600,000 on the project, which is 75% complete. The President of the PDC, Rodolfo Parker, is Presys’ largest shareholder and already “the government” has suggested taking control of the Santa Gertrudis’ aquifer.

In September 2007, Mayor Mena was a guest on the FMLN presidential candidate, Mauricio Funes’ news show. Mena claimed that he had felt some regret over questionable dealings surrounding the dump project, saying “As things stand, it might be best to invite you to my own funeral,” and admitted that the environmental impact review failed to address community health issues. Journalist Georgina Vanegas reported on the interaction and commented that throughout the interview, “the Mayor seemed puzzled and extremely vague about allegations waged against him, and



Observers visit FMLN office in Santa Ana to interview Francisco Polanco. Wall pictures are of presidential and vice-presidential candidates (Funes & Sanchez)

Photo: George Friemoth

even resigned to the community’s rejection of his project.”

In November 2007, sociology students from the University of San Salvador were invited by ACOFUBEN to investigate the water project because the Santa Ana government had, at that time, been refuting the existence of the aquifer. On November 22nd, over 500 members of the PNC and two police helicopters attacked the town for the fifth time. The raid resulted in 39 arrests and caused the death of 14-year old William Alfredo Ventura. All of the six students were arrested and called “terrorists.” Large-scale violence on the part of the police and their attacks on two television reporters caused an immediate press sensation and forced the Salvadoran government to call for a suspension of the project.

It was then that PDC tactics turned from overt repression to political maneuvering within the environmental ministry, in partnership with the US government’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). “The EPA sent their specialist, Kathy Gaynor, to do an environmental impact study like we had asked from the start. So were very happy at first,” said Santéliz Peraza. “But she didn’t take one sample of water away from the site. She was here for a day, looked around, and probably wrote the preliminary report in the same evening.”

The ministry eagerly accepted Gaynor’s report, which essentially rubber-stamped the position of the Mayor and his business partners at Presys and L and C, building from the false premise that the dump area was already contaminated and recommending that a few minor

design adjustments be made to “reduce risk to public health.” Santéliz Peraza called the EPA report biased and unprofessional, “giving favor to Presys and a green light to the construction of the landfill.”

Lawyers with the University of Central America’s Human Rights Office will try the Supreme Court case, which could take two or more years to review. The Court has placed a restraining order on Presys; technically no work can proceed on the dump until the case is decided. The class-action suit is the first in El Salvador’s history and could not only give entitled water and development rights to the community of Santa Gertrudis, but also prevent contamination of the Rio Veruente and the Rio Lempa,

which provide water to all of Santa Ana and 55% of the population of San Salvador. The case could also set a crucial precedent for broad community resistance to exploitation and privatization measures, most rigorously imposed by CAFTA.

On January 18, Mena lost his re-election bid. The FMLN candidate Francisco Polanco won the mayorship of Santa Ana. (Polanco campaigned on moving the waste dump away from the communities and any known watershed.)

Source: www.upsidedownworld.org, 6 January 2009

On the Home Front: Cuba Legislation

Great news! Legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate calling for an end of the travel ban on travel to Cuba for ALL US citizens. This will mean "Travel for All" instead of "Travel for None" or "Travel for Some."

The House Bill is H.R. 874, to allow travel between the United States and Cuba, for all US citizens and legal residents with no exceptions. It is called, "Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act." H.R. 874 is sponsored by Representative Bill Delahunt (D-MA) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ). It already has 50 co-sponsors including Representatives Lynn Woolsey, Barbara Lee, George Miller, Ellen Tauscher, Mike Honda and Sam Farr of the San Francisco Bay Area. Readers are urged to call and thank their Reps. or urge them to sign on.

The Senate Bill S. 428 is an identical bill with the same title. The original co-sponsors are Senators Christopher Dodd (D-CT) Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Michael Enzi (R-WY). Readers are urged to contact Senators Barbara Boxer (415-403-0100) and Dianne Feinstein (415-393-0707) or call the capitol switchboard for your Representative or Senators office in Washington: 202-224-3121 and ask them to co-sponsor S.428.(or H.R. 874).

Source: *Latin American Working Group, February 25, 2009, www.lawg.org*

Guatemala: President Apologizes to Cuba

On February 17, Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom visited Cuba and extended his apologies for the fact that his country was used to launch the mercenary invasion on the Bay of Pigs in 1961. "It wasn't us (the current Guatemalan government), but it was our territory, and I want to officially apologize to Cuba as president and head of state, and as commander in chief of the Guatemalan Army," Colom said

During a key lecture given at the University of Havana, Colom extolled Cuba's solidarity with his country. He said Cuban doctors in Guatemala have offered millions of medical consultations in the most remote areas and have returned or improved the sight of thousands of Guatemalans. Hundreds of

young Guatemalans are studying medical sciences in Cuba. The first group of Guatemalan doctors graduated in 2005. Colom presented Cuban leader Fidel Castro with the highest decoration in Guatemala, the Order of the Quetzal in the Degree of Great Necklace.

Source: *Gramma International and Prensa Latina, February 17, 2008*

Ecuador: Defaults on Foreign Debt

On December 12, President Rafael Correa declared that Ecuador would not make a \$30.6 million interest payment on \$510 million in bonds to foreign banks due in 2012, calling the debt illegal. The bond default totals \$9.937 billion, 19 percent of the country's GDP. Ecuador has assembled a legal team to fight expected lawsuits and hopes to use the default to renegotiate the debts.

Civil society organizations have long criticized foreign debt as a means of exploiting impoverished countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The anti-debt organization Jubilee USA says, "countries are paying debt service to wealthy nations and institutions at the expense of providing basic services to their citizens." In addition, lending institutions often use indebtedness to force cuts in social spending and impose business friendly economic policies.

The Confederation of Ecuatoran Kichwas, the powerful Andean branch of the country's indigenous peoples' movement, has long called the foreign debt illegal and illegitimate. "We have not acquired any debt. The so-called public debt belongs to the oligarchy. We the peoples have not acquired anything or been benefited, and thus we owe nothing."

Although Ecuador currently has the capacity to pay, dropping oil prices and squeezed credit markets are putting President Correa's plans to boost spending on education and health care in jeopardy. Correa has pledged to prioritize the "social debt" over debt to foreign creditors; especially creditors, that charged usurious interest rates.

Ecuador's default on some portion of its foreign debt would make it the second Latin American country to do so since Argentina in 2001.

Source: *Daniel Denvir, 12 December 2008, Daniel.denvir@gmail.com*

Venezuela / Colombia: Media's Double Standard

A new survey by FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) shows that, over the past 10 years, editors at four leading US newspapers (*New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times* and *Miami Herald*) have found more on purported human rights abuses in Venezuela than in Colombia. Their papers, FAIR found, seem more interested in reinforcing official US policy than in genuinely supporting the rights of Colombians and Venezuelans.

Any fair, evenhanded comparison of the Colombian and Venezuelan governments' human rights records would have to note that, though Venezuela's record is far from perfect, that country is by every measure a safer place than Colombia to live, vote, organize unions and political groups, speak out against the government or practice journalism.

What leads editors to discuss Colombia's appalling, nightmarish human rights record with less alarm than Venezuela's flawed but clearly superior record? The answer seems to lie in the relationship between the editors' views and US strategic thinking. Over the 10-year time frame of this study, US officials have highlighted human rights concerns in Venezuela out of opposition to the populist policies of its President Hugo Chávez, which they see as threatening to the US. At the same time, officials have tried to diminish the gravity of Colombia's human rights problems in order to sustain political support for a number of military, anti-drug projects the US shares with Colombia. The editors have created a virtual echo chamber for official US concerns regarding Venezuela's human rights record and democratic liberties.

Source: *Steve Randall, Daniel Ward and Tess Hall, February 2009, www.fair.org/index.php?page=3699*



Delegations for 2009

US/Mexico Border April 19-25

"Immigration and the Criminal Justice System"
\$600-\$750 sliding scale. Contact Heather or Ben,
education@borderlinks.org or 520/628-8263. See
www.BoderLinks.org for application

Paraguay May 31-June 10

Explore Resistance to Multinational Agrobusiness
and Human Right issues on our first delegation
after 60 Years of one party rule. \$1000 from
Asunción. Contact Dale 415/924-3227,
geodale1@earthlink.net. Co-sponsored by the
Task Force and SOA Watch

Venezuela June 17-26

After 10 Years of the Bolivarian Revolution, come
find out what's REALLY going on in Venezuela
today. Travel from Caracas to the coast and to the
state of Lara. Explore the revolution from within
and celebrate the Afro-Venezuelan San Juan
festival. \$1450 from Caracas. Contact Dale at
geodale1@earthlink.net Co-sponsored: Task Force
and SOA Watch

Caravan to Cuba July 3-August 3

15 routes will visit 130 US and Canadian cities.
Travel in school buses, trucks and cars to Cuba
via Mexico with construction, medical and
educational supplies collected from groups across
the US as a collective challenge to the US
blockade and travel ban on Cuba. Join, as a
vehicle passes through your community, or meet
in Texas on July 18. Spend 9 days in Cuba
returning August 3. Contact cucaravan@igc.org or
212/926-5757. for an application or to donate.
See: www.pastorsforpeace.org

Bolivia August 14-24

"Social Movement Democracy" On Jan. 25 the
Bolivian people approved a new constitution, a
demand first raised by the indigenous social
movements. Travel will begin in Santa Cruz, then
to Cochabamba of "water war" fame, on to La Paz
and the coca growing area of Los Yungas. \$1350
includes hotels, most meals and internal flights.
Contact Dale for info and an application. Task
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